

Upon the Burning of Our House by Anne Bradstreet

BEFORE YOU READ

LITERARY FOCUS: THE PLAIN STYLE

The Puritans favored “plainness” in all things: in dress, in the architecture and design of their churches, in their forms of worship, and in language. Unlike the ornate “high style” popular in England at the time, the Puritan **plain style** used simple sentences and common words from everyday speech. The plain style contained few or no classical allusions, Latin quotations, or elaborate figures of speech. The plain style, Puritans felt, was much more effective in revealing God’s truth than the ornate style. Despite the fact that the style used by Puritan writers now seems hard to read, it was considered simple and direct in the 1600s.

Although Anne Bradstreet’s “Upon the Burning of Our House” contains some figurative language, it is a good example of the plain style.

Make It Plain In the left column of the chart below are two descriptions of everyday objects written in an ornate style. Rewrite each description in plain style—as a Puritan might have.

Ornate Style	Plain Style
Shabby but beloved, my shoes house my feet as they carry me from place to place.	
The pen spills ink-blood as it brings words to life.	

READING SKILLS: ANALYZING TEXT STRUCTURES

“Upon the Burning of Our House” is filled with **inversions**. In an inversion, sentences are not written in normal word order. For example, Bradstreet writes “I wakened was with thund’ring noise” instead of “I was wakened with thund’ring noise.” Inversion is often used to make a poem’s **rhyme scheme** work out or to maintain a fixed **meter**.

Use the Skill As you read Anne Bradstreet’s poem, underline the places you find inversion.

REVIEW SKILLS

As you read “Upon the Burning of Our House,” notice the way the following literary devices are used.

RHYME

The repetition of vowel sounds in accented syllables and all syllables following.

METER

A pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.



Reading Standard 3.3

Analyze the ways in which irony, tone, mood, the author’s style, and the “sound” of language achieve specific rhetorical or aesthetic purposes or both.

Here Follow Some Verses upon the Burning of Our House, July 10, 1666

Anne Bradstreet

IDENTIFY

Circle the **inversions** you find in lines 1–4.

CLARIFY

What is the speaker doing in lines 11–12?

INTERPRET

In lines 16–17, why does the speaker say that the fire was “just?”

In silent night when rest I took

For sorrow near I did not look

I wakened was with thund’ring noise

And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.

5 That fearful sound of “Fire!” and “Fire!”

Let no man know is my desire.

I, starting up, the light did spy,

And to my God my heart did cry

To strengthen me in my distress

10 And not to leave me succorless.¹

Then, coming out, beheld a space

The flame consume my dwelling place.

And when I could no longer look,

I blest His name that gave and took,²

15 That laid my goods now in the dust.

Yea, so it was, and so ’twas just.

It was His own, it was not mine,

Far be it that I should repine;

He might of all justly bereft

20 But yet sufficient for us left.

When by the ruins oft I past

My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,

And here and there the places spy

Where oft I sat and long did lie:

1. **succorless** (suk’ər·lis) *adj.*: without aid or assistance; helpless.

2. **that gave and took**: allusion to Job 1:21, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

- 25 Here stood that trunk, and there that chest,
There lay that store I counted best.
My pleasant things in ashes lie,
And them behold no more shall I.
Under thy roof no guest shall sit,
30 Nor at thy table eat a bit.
No pleasant tale shall e'er be told,
Nor things recounted done of old.
No candle e'er shall shine in thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be.
35 In silence ever shall thou lie,
Adieu, Adieu, all's vanity.
Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide,
And did thy wealth on earth abide?
Didst fix thy hope on mold'ring dust?
40 The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
That dunghill mists away may fly.

- Thou hast an house on high erect,
Framed by that mighty Architect,
45 With glory richly furnished,
Stands permanent though this be fled.
It's purchased and paid for too
By Him who hath enough to do.
A price so vast as is unknown
50 Yet by His gift is made thine own;
There's wealth enough, I need no more,
Farewell, my pelf,³ farewell my store.
The world no longer let me love,
My hope and treasure lies above.

INTERPRET

What is the "house on high erect" described in lines 43–46?

INTERPRET

In line 44, who is the "mighty Architect"?

FLUENCY

Practice reading the boxed passage aloud. As you read the first time, notice the **rhymes** and strong **meter**. On your next readings, try to vary the rate of your reading to avoid sounding sing-song.

INTERPRET

Bradstreet's **plain style** helps to convey a complex message. In your own words, what is this message?

IDENTIFY

The poem is rhymed in couplets. Circle any end rhymes that do not rhyme exactly. (*Grade 9–10 Review*)

3. **pelf**: wealth or worldly goods (sometimes used as a term of contempt).

Here Follow Some Verses upon the Burning of Our House, July 10, 1666

Reading Skills and Strategies: Analyzing Text Structures “Upon the Burning of Our House” contains many instances of inversion, in which words appear in an unusual order. The left-hand column of the chart below lists several examples of inversion from the poem. In the right-hand column, write the inverted words or phrases in normal word order.

Example of Inversion from Poem	Restatement of Inversion
“In silent night when rest I took” (line 1)	
“I, starting up, the light did spy,” (line 7)	
“When by the ruins oft I past” (line 21)	
“My pleasant things in ashes lie,” (line 27)	
“And them behold no more shall I.” (line 28)	



Check your Standards Mastery at the back of this book.

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Selection: _____ Author: _____

Plain Style

The **plain style** is a way of writing that stresses simplicity and clarity of expression.

DIRECTIONS: Read the selection, and find examples of the four characteristics of plain style. Fill in the chart below with the examples. Answer the questions below to help you analyze the plain style.

Everyday
language

Simple
sentences

Direct
statements

Biblical
references

Questions to Help Analyze Plain Style

1. What other style of writing was popular in England during the time of the Puritans?
How was this style different from the plain style?

2. Why does the plain style seem difficult to today's reader?
